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RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 2986
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 8630
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2781
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 5357
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4012
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 1286
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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

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SUBJECT: MFA DISCUSSES NEED FOR ASSISTANCE, PRESS FREEDOM

¶1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 17, 2006 visiting NEA/MAG Office Director William Jordan met separately with MFA Director of Bilateral Affairs Youssef Amrani and MFA Director of American Affairs Salahuddin Tazi to discuss bilateral issues and the Western Sahara (septel). Accompanying NEA/MAG Director were DCM, Polcouns, and Poloff. Tazi stressed that Morocco is in a unique position to play a "bridge" role for the U.S. on cooperation matters. Expressing the GOM's desire for more USG financial assistance, Tazi explained that, in addition to positive economic effects, additional financial support can contribute to the stability of Morocco. On press freedoms, Jordan explained to Amrani that U.S. comments on Moroccan press freedoms are not meant to be negative, but should be viewed as encouragement to take critical next steps towards a more open press environment. DCM added that the GOM has full control over the progress of press freedoms and there is little space for external factors to slow progress. END SUMMARY.

Bilateral Affairs: Assistance, Partnership, and Press
Freedoms

¶3. (SBU) Visiting NEA/MAG Office Director William Jordan on February 17, 2006 paid separate calls on Youssef Amrani, MFA Director of Bilateral Affairs, and Salahuddin Tazi, MFA Director of American Affairs. DCM, Polcouns, and Poloff attended both meetings. Tazi used this opportunity to express the GOM's desire for more USG financial support. Pointing out that Morocco has taken positive steps on governmental responsibility, accountability, and transparency, Tazi stressed that Morocco, as a partner of the U.S. and a country with the same objectives as the U.S., can play the role of "bridge" for the U.S. on cooperation issues. Citing the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), Tazi noted that Morocco, given its extensive knowledge of MCA criteria, has been approached by Cameroon to discuss MCA eligibility.

¶4. (SBU) Tazi argued that financial assistance, in addition to having positive economic effects, can also contribute to the stability of Morocco. The more stable Morocco is, the more Morocco can defend the interests of the U.S. and Morocco, explained Tazi. Jordan stressed that USG assistance should complement greater human development, and that

Morocco's MCA eligibility opens up new doors for assistance. He added that Morocco is a vital and active partner of the U.S. in this region, and as such, Morocco should share its expertise with other countries in the region. Commenting on GOM efforts to promote human development, Tazi explained that Morocco needs to develop the country and provide jobs, particularly in rural areas, so that terrorists cannot be easily recruited. The King's National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), as Tazi said, recognizes and takes a fresh and hard look at poverty in Morocco and is creating a strategy to tackle this problem.

15. (SBU) Tazi emphasized the positive and frank dialogue the GOM has with the Embassy, including on sensitive issues such as freedom of the press. Jordan emphasized that U.S. remarks on the state of Moroccan press freedoms should not be viewed as negative criticism, but should be seen by the GOM as encouragement to take critical next steps. Tazi responded that a bill to decriminalize libel is being discussed and will be presented to parliament very soon. DCM added, and Tazi acknowledged, that progress, or lack thereof, on freedom of expression may harm Morocco's future MCA eligibility, and progress on freedom of expression is something that is solely in the control of the GOM, with little room for external factors to cause delay. He urged the GOM to continue to push forward legislation to decriminalize libel.

16. (U) NEA/MAG Office Director Jordan has cleared this cable.

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